
FEATURE ARTICLE

Croatia A Small Country But Not a Small People

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CROATIAN FLAG

The coat-of-arms of the Republic of Croatia is a historical Croatian symbol in the form of a shield decorated with red and white (silver) fields, of which the first field in the upper left-hand corner is red. Above the shield, there is a crown with five smaller shields bearing historical Croatian coats-of-arms representing (from left to right): the oldest known Croatian coat-of-arms, the Dubrovnik Republic, Dalmatia, Istria, and Slavonia. The coat-of-arms of the Republic of Croatia is placed at the center of the flag which has three horizontal stripes: red, white, and blue.

The Republic of Croatia, situated on the crossroads between Central Europe and the Mediterranean, is spread across 56,542 square kilometers of land area. A small but diverse country, Croatia borders with Slovenia to the north, Hungary to the northeast, Bosnia-Herzegovina to the south, and Serbia and Vojvodina to the southeast. The geographic shape of today's Croatia (the shape of an extended horseshoe formed by elongated Adriatic and Pannonian strips with a broader central zone) is the result of the 14-century long history of the Croatian people in this crossroads of different civilizations. According to its relief and geographical position, Croatia can be divided into three main regions: Adriatic, Dinaric, and Pannonian.



The Croatian Adriatic Sea is one of the most beautiful seas in the world, and as such, attracts many tourists, particularly from Central and Western Europe. Croatia's coastline, which is 5,835 kilometers long, has the most hours of sunshine in Europe after Spain. Along the Adriatic coast, which is the second most indented coastline in Europe (second only to the Norwegian coast), there are 1,185 islands out of which 67 or only 6 percent are inhabited. Because of this, Croatia is often referred to as the coast of one thousand islands. Korcula, a southern Dalmatian fortified city. Korcula is the birthplace of Marco Polo. One of Zagreb's greatest assets is its well preserved surroundings.



Korcula, a southern Dalmatian fortified city. The birthplace of Marco Polo.

Forests cover 36 per cent of Croatia's surface area. The most densely forested region is that of Gorski Kotar, located in the Dinaric region, and also that of eastern Croatia. The Pannonian region is mainly characterized by large fertile plains defined by rivers. Among the largest of these rivers are the Sava, Drava, Kupa and Dunav (Danube). The longest river in Croatia is the Sava, measuring 562 kilometers. It flows into the Dunav which in turn flows into the Black Sea.

Population

According to the 2001 census, Croatia has a population of 4,381,352 or 80.5 people per square kilometer. The most densely populated area is central Croatia with the capital Zagreb, the administrative, cultural and academic center of the country, having a population of 770,058 or close to one-fifth of the entire population. The majority of the population (roughly 90 percent) are Croats. National minorities include Serbs, Muslims, Slovenes, Hungarians, Czechs, Slovaks, Italians, and others. It is also important to note that many Croats live outside the borders of Croatia. Approximately 700,000 live in Bosnia-Herzegovina and many live in Serbia, mostly in Vojvodina (today part of Serbia). Several thousand Croats live in Montenegro, and more than 50,000 live in Slovenia. In relation to its population, Croatia has one of the greatest rates of emigration in the world. It has been estimated that about one million Croats and their descendants live in the countries of Western Europe. Today more than two million Croats and their descendants (I being one of them) live scattered around the world, mostly in the Americas and

Australia. The majority of the population is Roman Catholic, and the others are Eastern Orthodox, Muslims, and Christians of other denominations. The official language is Croatian, the alphabet is Latin, and in some areas minority groups are allowed to use their language and alphabet.

Economy and Tourism

In economic terms, Croatia has a Central European tradition, but almost fifty years of Communism, seventy years of Yugoslav exploitation, and five years of aggression against Croatia have caused extensive damage and left far-reaching consequences. The most important industries are agriculture, shipbuilding, metal and lumber processing, the chemical industry, construction, domestic oil pumping and processing, and food production. Other industries include: fishing, fruit-growing, wines and spirits, especially high-quality wines in Dalmatia, Slavonia, and Istria. Among the non-manufacturing industries, the most important is tourism and the shipping industry. In the shipbuilding industry,



Croatia is one of the leading countries in the world regarding the number, size and quality of its ships.



One of Zagreb's greatest assets is its well preserved surroundings.

The walls of Diocletian's palace and the Romanesque-Gothic bell tower of St. Dujam's cathedral give Split a special atmosphere and charm.

Croatia's geographic position makes it very important in this part of the world, but this is also probably one of the reasons why so many foreigners wanted to conquer it throughout history. Despite great hardship throughout its history, Croatia has never lost its national identity and culture. The Croatian people, although not large in number, have managed to remain at this crossroads of natural beauty and treasures for more than a thousand years.

About the Author

Andrijana Jelic is a 1995 honors graduate from Queens College of the City University of New York where she earned her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science. Jelic moved to Zagreb, Croatia

to work as a linguist with the Croatian Information Center. Ms. Jelic translated excerpts of many scholarly works such as *South-Eastern Europe 1918-1995*, which is published by the Croatian Information Center. She produces daily news bulletins in English for the Foreign Press bureau. In 1999, Jelic began her employment with United States European Command as the international military education and training Coordinator/Budget Analyst in the Office of Defense Cooperation in Zagreb, Croatia. Jelic works directly with the Croatian Ministry of Defense and U.S. military services on all matters concerning the international military education and training program. In September 2000, Jelic was presented with the Achievement Medal for Civilian Service and was later selected as the USEUCOM Civilian of the Year.



Pula is the 1st century arena built by Roman Emperor Vespasian.